

Sunday's Sermon

GLORIA DEI LUTHERAN CHURCH

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

September 11, 2022

The Reverend David E. Fox

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Year C) 2022

Luke 15:1-10

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

I needed to put together a large toy for my son on Christmas Day. It was a rather large toy with a lot of pieces. I was down to the last piece to put on, and I could not find it anywhere. I looked through the box, all over the floor, in the plastic that the pieces were wrapped in – nothing. The piece was missing. It wasn't missing because I misplaced it, it was missing from the box. Without the one little piece, the toy was incomplete. Could you still play with the toy? Sure. However, every time you looked at it, you knew something was missing.

The same is true if you have a puzzle you have almost completed, except for the missing piece or two from its five-hundred pieces. Or if you're at the restaurant and you ordered your burger just the way you wanted, and they left off one of the toppings. Whether it is a small yellow piece of plastic from a toy, the very small piece of a puzzle, a slice of tomato, or a person, we recognize the incompleteness without it or them.

In our gospel reading for today we hear that Jesus is one that welcomes sinners and eats with them. And of course, this has some of the religious leaders grumbling about what Jesus is doing. Jesus must have overheard their grumbling, and he tells three parables all dealing with something or someone that was lost. Today, we hear only two of those three stories – the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. We don't have the Lost Son story, or the Prodigal Son as we've come to know it; that comes at a different time in our lectionary cycle.

We will focus on the two parables we have before us today. In the first of the two parables, Jesus tells of a shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness to go after the one sheep that is lost. The shepherd then finds the sheep, carries it on his shoulders, and then calls everyone he knows together to have a party so they can rejoice that the one sheep was found.

In the second parable, Jesus tells of a woman who now has nine coins because she has lost one coin. She searches the house over, and when she finds it she calls everyone together that she knows to have a party so they can rejoice that the one coin was found. I always imagine her spending the amount that the lost, now found, coin is worth to throw a great party with her family and neighbors.

Both of these parables tell us something is missing, and it is really important to find what is missing. The shepherd wants to find the sheep. The woman wants to find the coin. Jesus wants to find the "sinner" or really the outcast. Why? Because they all recognize the incompleteness without it or without them.

You all have felt it when you've lost someone you truly loved. That emptiness. That feeling of being incomplete without them in your life. But have you ever felt that as the Body of Christ, as the Church? Too many churches have people that look alike, have the same first language, have the same social class, the same political beliefs, the same goals, etc. And though that works for those churches, they should feel as if something is missing. They need to know they are incomplete without those other people.

Church, we have to make room for all types of people; people who are different from ourselves. Because without being a church with all different kinds of people, we are incomplete.

I emailed that company about the one piece that was missing from this massive toy. They replied that the piece was on its way to my home. What arrived was the entire toy, with all of the pieces. A complete toy. Do you think that I rebuilt another toy? No. I pulled out the one piece I needed from the box and snapped it into the toy I had constructed two days earlier. I had all of the pieces. It was now complete.

Notice the numbers in our reading are incomplete. There are ninety-nine sheep and there are nine coins after she loses the one. In Biblical times, numbers like ten and one-hundred represented completeness. One less, like nine and ninety-nine are incomplete. To become complete, the one must be found. The sheep must be found. The coin must be found. The outcast, stranger, and/or sinner must be found. And when these things or these people are found, we should rejoice.

All the religious leaders are seeing, is that these folks they call sinners, should not be part of the group. They would rather disassociate than try and bring them into the fold. They are missing the fact that they are missing something or someone. They, as a people, are incomplete without the others. The fact they don't recognize their incompleteness, keeps them from being able to rejoice in the work Jesus is doing.

People of Gloria Dei, how much rejoicing have you done lately? If the answer is you can't remember when or don't even know when you rejoiced as a people of God, then maybe we're just as incomplete as the religious leaders found in today's text.

We are called to be a community that welcomes and eats with sinners, with outcasts, with strangers. We are called to be a community where everyone is welcomed and loved. We are called to be a church that has blue collar, white collar, and no collar folks. We are called to be a church that has Independent, Republican, Democrat, and those that couldn't care less about politics. We are called to be a church that is red, yellow, black, and white – brown too as our skin tones. We are called to be a church with the old lady that has never taken a sip of alcohol, other than from Communion and the young man who struggles to keep his job because of his addiction. We are called to be the church filled with the traditional families and the untraditional families – heterosexual, homosexual, asexual. We are called to be the church filled with those with homes and those without. We are called to be the church with those that eat out every meal and those that don't know from where their next meal is coming. We are called to be this type of community, because without all of these folks, we are incomplete.

Some of you may be grumbling at the folks I just mentioned. And I'll just make this comment: the religious leaders in Jesus' day did the same thing. You can either spend your life grumbling or you can spend your life rejoicing. All of those people I listed are Children of God – they all matter – and they all are loved by God. Will you rejoice with the shepherd? Will you rejoice with the woman? Will you rejoice with the angels of God?

Sisters and brothers, the more rejoicing we do the more complete we are. I hope all of you sign up to be on the welcoming committee. There is much rejoicing to be done.